DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 341 342 HE 025 238

AUTHOR Atchison, Leigh A.; And Others
TITLE Closing the Zipper: Exploring Course Specific Goals.
PUB DATE Nov 91
NOTE 13p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Mid-South Educational Research Association (Lexington, KY, November 13-15, 1991).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *College Faculty; *College Freshmen; College Instruction; *Educational Objectives; Goal Orientation; Higher Education; Introductory Courses; Psychology; Sex Differences; *Student Educational Objectives; Student Interests; Teacher Attitudes; Teacher Student Relationship

ABSTRACT

A study was done to identify college student course goals and to compare student goals with faculty goals. The study used the Student Goals Exploration (SGE) inventory and administered that inventory in early spring semester of 1991 to 221 students enrolled in introductory psychology courses at a small public liberal arts college. The SGE Faculty Perspective was also administered to the three instructors teaching sections of the course. The data obtained were analyzed using a statistical system, developing frequency tables for each variable and visually scanning and comparing student responses to each other and to instructors. Data regarding sex differences was also analyzed. The subjects were 74 percent freshmen, 84 percent white, and 64 percent female. Student goals were strongly vocational and highly individualistic. A comparison of student and faculty goals found many in common. Differences included students holding more independent, personal goals aimed at career success while faculty held goals for the study of specific areas of psychology that students did not share. All of the faculty held interpreting numerical data as an essential goal while 67 percent of the student regarded it as unimportant. Gender analysis found females to have higher personal development or improvement goals and higher test-taking anxiety. Included are nine references. (JB)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED341342

CLOSING THE ZIPPER
EXPLORING COURSE-SPECIFIC GOALS

by

Leigh A. Atchison, University of Alabama,
Melissa R. Eppers, University of West Florida,
and
Julia S. Rogers, University of Montevallo

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Leigh Atchison

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)"

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☒ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy

Paper presented at the
Annual Meeting of the Mid-South Educational Research Association
Lexington, Kentucky

November, 1991

HE 025 238

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Closing the Zipper
Exploring Course-Specific Goals

Assessment is a major focus of most institutions of higher education. The process of assessment is an important one in that it ensures that colleges are held accountable and that students are learning and developing in accordance with the institution's goals. While some colleges may feel pressured by the need to constantly assess student outcomes, it was noted that many faculty "have come to regard [assessment] as a systematic means of collecting evidence of student development that can suggest directions for improving teaching and learning" (Banta & Pike, 1983). One way of using assessment not only for the purposes of credentialing and measuring outcomes for graduating seniors, but also as a means of improving current instructional methods and curriculum for individual courses is known as classroom research.

Patricia Cross, in her article "In Search of Zippers," (1988) has called for more classroom research to study the link between assessment and the improvement of learning. She states that "the basic premise of classroom research is that teachers should use their classrooms as laboratories to study the learning process as it applies to their particular disciplines" (1988).

Evaluating students at a more specialized level has led researchers to pay more attention to the factors students bring with them to a learning environment. Stark (1989) points out that "student preparation, self-confidence, and goals are important to faculty as they plan most introductory courses." Students in such courses may not always have clear, specific goals in mind for each course, but instead may have more broad goals related to attending

college. Some educators feel that in the haste to assess, educational goals of students have not been given proper consideration and that the process of general education may be hurried through in order for students to begin concentrating on their major field studies (Jacobson, 1986).

More recently, increased weight has been given to the importance of the goals students bring into a classroom and the "fit" between these goals and those of the instructor or, more broadly, the institution. The results of a study by Stark and Morstain (1978) indicate that faculty at liberal arts colleges do vary widely in the goals they feel are important for students to accomplish, and the researchers also note that recent research shows that students, too, range widely in the goals they value and that "degree of congruence in faculty and student educational attitudes is related to student satisfaction with their academic experiences". Therefore, an instructor, or even an institution, may benefit greatly from an increased awareness of their own goals for student development as well as those their students may be working toward.

Though the importance for goals recently has been given recognition, goals have not yet become an integral part of the assessment process. After their review of relevant research literature, Stark et al. (1990), concluded that "goals are neglected because there have been no useful instruments to measure the goals students bring to courses". They go on to note that, though there were some broad-based goal inventories, none existed that assessed student goals for a specific course and that might be helpful in identifying how these goals relate to the learning process. Other researchers have also noted the link between academic learning and personal goals. Sadler (1983) includes attending to goals as the first of his three components

of academic learning, followed by "devising strategies and making moves" and then "monitoring the discrepancy between current status and the desired end". Therefore, according to Sadler's theory, in order for academic learning to take place, a student needs to become aware of his goals for attending college or the goals his professor deems important. If one accepts Sadler's model of academic learning, the importance of a method of assessing student goals becomes apparent.

In order to fill the need for such a method of educational assessment, Stark et al. (1989) developed a theoretical framework for a student goals inventory and from that base was developed the Student Goals Exploration (SGE) (1990). In developing this inventory, they incorporated segments of psychological and motivational surveys developed by others (i.e. Pace's early Quality of Student Experience Survey and Pintrich's Motivated Strategies for Learning Questionnaire). Two sets of SGE inventories were developed to meet differing assessment needs. The institutional research (IR I and IR II) versions of the SGE are designed to be used by researchers or administrators to assess the broad goals of students in an entire program or college. The classroom research (CR I and CR II) versions are designed to be used by individual instructors to assess the more specific, course-related goals of their students. With both sets of inventories, the first version is administered early in the academic term and the second is given late in the academic term. Both the IR and CR versions can provide a great deal of information gained from analysis of the scales included in each section of the inventories.

The CR versions, used in our study, are designed so that useful information can be gained from simply "eye-balling" the data or using more complex analysis methods. These

options may encourage more involvement of the part of the faculty members. Stark et al. (1989) point out: "Only modest gains in teaching in teaching improvement would result if researchers administered goals inventories and provided the results to faculty members. Greater gains could be expected if faculty were involved in helping use a goals inventory in their classrooms, perhaps adding some goals they feel are particularly important". Included with some of the sections is this option of adding "local" items that a teacher may feel are important but are not included on the scale.

The first survey section of the CR I version presents nineteen goals for attending college. The student is asked to indicate the importance of each goal on a scale of 1 = not important to 4 = essential. It includes reasons such as "I wanted to get a better job after college" and "to prepare for a life of service to society". There are several subscales for this section designed to discover whether students motivations are vocational, intellectual, or external to themselves.

The second section, "Goals in Taking This Course", is referred to as the "heart of the SGE" (Stark et al., 1990). Students are asked to focus on the specific courses for which they are filling out the inventory. Two sets of scales were determined for this section. They include nine subject-specific scales, which are those that characterize the goals of students majoring in certain fields or those taking an introductory course in that field, and one "universally endorsed scale". which includes items strongly endorsed by students regardless of the course in which they are enrolled (1990). The second set of scales included are the general academic orientation scales, which consist of fifteen scales indicating more broad and

general goals of students. Typical questions may include subjects such as developing a life philosophy or enjoying learning for learning's sake.

Recently, the developers of the SGE have developed a related goals inventory, designed to be administered to the instructors when students receive the CR I and/or CR II versions. It simply consists of the same "Goals in Taking This Course" section as mentioned previously and a few questions to obtain demographic information. Because it contains the same 110 goal questions as the CR versions in that section, it will enable one to compare student goals with those an instructor has for the course.

A third section of the CR versions is entitled "Feelings About Studying in This Course." It is intended to assess several attributes traditionally ignored in educational research. It's scales are designed to assess goal time frame (long versus short) and goal source (internal versus external). The results from this section may help to clarify the goals that are indicated in the "Goals in Taking This Course" section by showing the time frame from which students are working and the source of their motivations.

A final section in the CR I version is designed to assess student's anxiety or self-confidence about the course, expectations of success, learning strategies, diligence when studying, and desire for academic independence. The two scales here are the Self-Confident Scholar and the Anxious Student. It may be helpful for students and educators alike to be aware of the goal difference and implications of these levels of confidence.

The CR II version has one added section entitled "Types of Activities Pursued in This Course", in which students report related activities they have pursued during the term. It is

designed to see if students pursue activities that relate and apply to coursework, interact about coursework, explore beyond assignments, or if they only concentrate on the current task.

Finally, two student information sections are included. They ask for standard demographic information (sex, ethnic background, year in college) as well as student's perceptions of their preparedness for college, certainty about career goal information given, satisfaction with college, and other subjective questions. These sections are optional with the CR versions and use of the resulting information is also left to the researchers' discretion.

In our study we have attempted to identify student goals, their similarities and differences, and compare these goals with those of the faculty. Stark et al. (1990) have suggested that "instructors and students who recognize discrepancies between their goals can work toward the convergence of the two sets of goals". This convergence of goals may be accomplished by modification of course content to better meet student needs and/or by helping students clarify and expand their goals during the course.

Method

The Student Goals Exploration inventory, CR I version, was administered early in spring semester of 1991 to 221 students enrolled in introductory psychology courses at a small public liberal arts college. The SGE Faculty Perspective was administered to the three instructors teaching sections of the course.

The students completed the inventory during regular class time. The inventory took approximately twenty-five minutes to complete. The students were reminded to work quickly and to keep in mind the specific course for which they were completing the inventory.

The data obtained was analyzed using the SAS statistical system. Because of the nature of the inventory, it was possible to obtain useful data by creating frequency tables for each variable and visually scanning and comparing the students to each other as well as the instructors. Data regarding sex differences was analyzed using chi square. At this time we have not performed analyses of the individual sub-scales of the SGE.

Results

The 221 subjects were approximately 74% freshman, 14% sophomore, 9% junior and 3% senior. Ethnicity was broken down into 84% caucasian, 11% black, 1 % Hispanic and .9% Native American. There were 142 females (64%), 77 males (35%) and 2 unspecified. Seventy percent took this course because it was required. Forty percent planned to acquire a Master's degree as the highest level of education, 24% planned to stop at a bachelor's degree, 14% wanted to receive a Ph.d, and 11% planned to receive an M.D. Expected majors were varied with 20% as business, 16% education, and 15% undecided. The rest were distributed with percentages under 5%.

Frequency tables were run on all variables and comparisons were made. This type of analysis was both productive and appropriate for this instrument as it was designed for use by professors to "eye-ball" the answers to get a feel for their students. More complex analysis can and will be used later. Students in this study held common goals that were strongly vocational. Seventy-two percent felt attending college was essential in getting a better job after they graduate. Seventy-seven percent felt attending college was necessary to have a successful career. This group also had highly individualistic goals. They held as important developing skills in leadership, setting their own goals and developing personal independence.

While students wanted the freedom to select their own topics and goals, 58% felt they would learn best if the instructor made clear the goals of each assignment. One other goal that the majority of students held as essential was to be able to gain information from this course that they could use after college in their family life.

From comparison of the frequency tables ran on both faculty and students, many of the goals were found to be similar to both groups. Those goals held in common were, for example: being able to understand my own abilities, to help improve decision-making and problem solving, to see relationships/differences among ideas and to draw conclusions from observations. There were some outstanding differences as well. Students seemed to hold more independent, personal goals which were aimed toward success in a career. These types include social skills for different situations, personal independence, helping others who need my skill, to be able to perform credibly, to promote leadership and to improve decision-making in my job. It was noted that faculty held high goals for the study of specific areas of psychology that the students did not share. One-hundred percent of the faculty held interpreting numerical data as an essential goal of this course. Sixty-seven percent of students viewed this goal as not important. Faculty also held learning more about science as an important goal, though students did not see it as relevant to the course. These two differences may be due to the students lack of understanding psychology as an empirical science.

Chi-square analyses were performed to find differences between males and females on all variables of the test using the .05 level of significance. Females differed greatly from males for personal development/improvement types of goals. Females, more than males,

wanted to develop their own philosophy of life, their values, clarify their beliefs and increase sense of self-worth. They also scored markedly higher on goals pertaining to preparation of a career and gaining a general education. Additionally, females more strongly endorsed such goals as: to enjoy learning for learning's sake, to see how different ideas and facts fit together and to prepare for a life of service to others. While females scored significantly higher than males on asking for an instructor's help on clarifying concepts, results also indicated that they experience higher anxiety when test-taking.

Males did not have markedly higher scores than females on any item. These results may not be representative of males and females in general, but they are specific to the group at the University of Montevallo and this course studied.

Discussion

Overall, findings in this study support those of previous research on student goals. Theophilides and Wright (1987) found that incoming students rank general education or vocational education first or second as goals they possess, with the development of interpersonal skills ranking third. The strongest consensus from our subjects concerned questions regarding getting a better job, having a successful career, gaining a general education and enjoying learning for learning's sake.

Though our subjects were not randomly chosen they do seem to be fairly representative of the population of students at this university, with similar male/female and black/white ratios. Most of our results were gained from simply "eye-balling" the data, but the Classroom Research versions of the SGE are designed to be suited for just such a purpose. This enables instructors to quickly get an idea of the general goals of a group of students.

In general, our subjects shared many of the same goals for the course as the instructors. Some notable differences did occur as noted in the results, especially with regard to viewing psychology as a science and the usefulness of learning to interpret numerical data in a psychology course. It will be interesting to see if with the administration of the CR II version of the SGE, the instructors have impressed upon students that these goals are important in general psychology.

The implications of these kinds of findings for use in the classroom are numerous. The findings may, of course, not represent specific views of students on other campuses, but the SGE will enable faculty and students at other institutions to discover the differences and similarities of their own goals. An instructor will be able to note large discrepancies between what they wish to teach and what the students hope to gain from a specific course. Discovering ways to converge these goals will be another link in the zipper that closes the gap between assessment and the improvement of learning.

References

Banta, T. W., & Pike G. R. (1983). Methods for comparing outcomes assessment instruments. *Research in Higher Education, 30,* 455-469.

Cross, K. P. (1988). In search of zippers. *AAHE Bulletin, 40,* 3-7.

Jacobson, R. L. (1986). Efforts to assess students learning may trivialize the B.A., Boyer says. *Chronicle of Higher Education, 59,* pp. 41.

MacMillan, J. H. (1988). Beyond value-added education: Improvement alone is not enough. *Journal of Higher Education, 59,* 564-579.

Sadler, D. R. (1983). Evaluation and the improvement of academic learning. *Journal of Higher Education, 54,* 60-79.

Stark, J. S., Lowther, M. A., Shaw, K. M., & Sossen P. L. (1990). *Student goals exploration: Users manual* (Preliminary edition). Ann Arbor, MI: NCRIPTAL.

Stark, J. S., & Morstain B. R. (1978). Educational orientations of faculty in liberal arts college: An analysis of disciplinary differences. *Journal of Higher Education, 49,*420-437.

Stark, J. S., Shaw, K. M., Lowther, M. A., & Ryan, M. P. (1989). *Student goals for college and courses: A missing link in assessing and improving academic achievement.* Washington, DC: ASHE-ERIC Higher Education Report, No. 6.

Theophilides, P. T., & Wright, T. M. (1987). Influences on students academic growth during four years of college. *Research in Higher Education, 26,* 161-179.

Acknowledgements

The authors thank Joan Stark and her colleagues at NCRIPTAL, developers of the Student Goals Exploration instruments, for permission to use the SGE in our research and for providing us information and support for our project. We would also like to thank the staff of the computer center at the University of Montevallo for their assistance, and especially thank Robert Bolen of the Southern Company in Atlanta, our long-distance SAS consultant.